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155 Words To Describe An Author's Tone

What is tone?

Tone refers to an author's use of words and writing style to convey his or her attitude towards a topic. Tone is often defined as what the author feels about the subject. What the reader feels is known as the mood.

Tip: Don't confuse tone with voice. Voice can be explained as the author's personality expressed in writing. Tone = Attitude. Voice = Personality.

Tone (attitude) and voice (personality) create a writing style. You may not be able to alter your personality but you can adjust your attitude. This gives you ways

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to create writing that affects your audience's mood.



The mechanics

Tone is conveyed through diction (choice and use of words and phrases), viewpoint, syntax (grammar; how you put words and phrases together), and level of formality. It is the way you express yourself in speech or writing.

How do you find the correct tone?

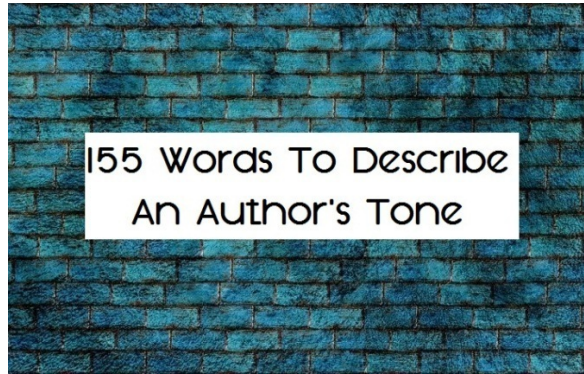
You can usually find a tone by asking these three questions:

1. Why am I writing this?
2. Who is my intended audience?
3. What do I want the reader to learn, understand, or think about?

In **formal writing**, your tone should be clear, concise, confident, and courteous. The writing level should be sophisticated,

but not pretentious.

In **creative writing**, your tone is more subjective, but you should always aim to communicate clearly. Genre sometimes determines the tone.



Tone	Meaning
Absurd	illogical; ridiculous; silly; implausible; foolish
Accusatory	suggesting someone has done something wrong, complaining
Acerbic	sharp; forthright; biting; hurtful; abrasive; severe
Admiring	approving; think highly of; respectful; praising
Aggressive	hostile; determined; forceful; argumentative

Aggrieved	indignant; annoyed; offended; disgruntled
Ambivalent	having mixed feelings; uncertain; in a dilemma; undecided
Amused	entertained; diverted; pleased
Angry	incensed or enraged; threatening or menacing
Animated	full of life or excitement; lively; spirited; impassioned; vibrant
Apathetic	showing little interest; lacking concern; indifferent; unemotional
Apologetic	full of regret; repentant; remorseful; acknowledging failure
Appreciative	grateful; thankful; showing pleasure; enthusiastic
Ardent	enthusiastic; passionate
Arrogant	pompous; disdainful;

	overbearing; condescending; vain; scoffing
Assertive	self-confident; strong-willed; authoritative; insistent
Awestruck	amazed, filled with wonder/awe; reverential
Belligerent	hostile; aggressive; combatant
Benevolent	sympathetic; tolerant; generous; caring; well meaning
Bitter	angry; acrimonious; antagonistic; spiteful; nasty
Callous	cruel disregard; unfeeling; uncaring; indifferent; ruthless
Candid	truthful, straightforward; honest; unreserved
Caustic	making biting, corrosive comments; critical
Cautionary	gives warning; raises awareness; reminding

Celebratory	praising; pay tribute to; glorify; honour
Chatty	informal; lively; conversational; familiar
Colloquial	familiar; everyday language; informal; colloquial; casual
Comic	humorous; witty; entertaining; diverting
Compassionate	sympathetic; empathetic; warm-hearted; tolerant; kind
Complex	having many varying characteristics; complicated
Compliant	agree or obey rules; acquiescent; flexible; submissive
Concerned	worried; anxious; apprehensive
Conciliatory	intended to placate or pacify; appeasing
Condescending	stooping to the level of one's inferiors; patronising
Confused	unable to think clearly; bewildered;

	vague
Contemptuous	showing contempt; scornful; insolent; mocking
Critical	finding fault; disapproving; scathing; criticizing
Cruel	causing pain and suffering; unkind; spiteful; severe
Curious	wanting to find out more; inquisitive; questioning
Cynical	scornful of motives/virtues of others; mocking; sneering
Defensive	defending a position; shielding; guarding; watchful
Defiant	obstinate; argumentative; defiant; contentious
Demeaning	disrespectful; undignified
Depressing	sad, melancholic; discouraging; pessimistic
Derisive	snide; sarcastic; mocking; dismissive;

	scornful
Detached	aloof; objective; unfeeling; distant
Dignified	serious; respectful; formal; proper
Diplomatic	tactful; subtle; sensitive; thoughtful
Disapproving	displeased; critical; condemnatory
Disheartening	discouraging; demoralising; undermining; depressing
Disparaging	dismissive; critical; scornful
Direct	straightforward; honest
Disappointed	discouraged; unhappy because something has gone wrong
Dispassionate	impartial; indifferent; unsentimental; cold; unsympathetic
Distressing	heart-breaking; sad; troubling
Docile	compliant; submissive; deferential; accommodating

Earnest	showing deep sincerity or feeling; serious
Egotistical	self-absorbed; selfish; conceited; boastful
Empathetic	understanding; kind; sensitive
Encouraging	optimistic; supportive
Enthusiastic	excited; energetic
Evasive	ambiguous; cryptic; unclear
Excited	emotionally aroused; stirred
Facetious	inappropriate; flippant
Farcical	ludicrous; absurd; mocking; humorous and highly improbable
Flippant	superficial; glib; shallow; thoughtless; frivolous
Forceful	powerful; energetic; confident; assertive
Formal	respectful; stilted; factual; following accepted styles/rules
Frank	honest; direct; plain;

	matter-of-fact
Frustrated	annoyed; discouraged
Gentle	kind; considerate; mild; soft
Ghoulish	delighting in the revolting or the loathsome
Grim	serious; gloomy; depressing; lacking humour; macabre
Gullible	naïve; innocent; ignorant
Hard	unfeeling; hard-hearted; unyielding
Humble	deferential; modest
Humorous	amusing; entertaining; playful
Hypercritical	unreasonably critical; hair splitting; nitpicking
Impartial	unbiased; neutral; objective
Impassioned	filled with emotion; ardent
Imploring	pleading; begging
Impressionable	trusting; child-like

Inane	silly; foolish; stupid; nonsensical
Incensed	enraged
Incredulous	disbelieving; unconvinced; questioning; suspicious
Indignant	annoyed; angry; dissatisfied
Informative	instructive; factual; educational
Inspirational	encouraging; reassuring
Intense	earnest; passionate; concentrated; deeply felt
Intimate	familiar; informal; confidential; confessional
Ironic	the opposite of what is meant
Irreverent	lacking respect for things that are generally taken seriously
Jaded	bored; having had too much of the same thing; lack enthusiasm

Joyful	positive; optimistic; cheerful; elated
Judgmental	critical; finding fault; disparaging
Laudatory	praising; recommending
Light-Hearted	carefree; relaxed; chatty; humorous
Loving	affectionate; showing intense, deep concern
Macabre	gruesome; horrifying; frightening
Malicious	desiring to harm others or to see others suffer; ill-willed; spiteful
Mean-Spirited	inconsiderate; unsympathetic
Mocking	scornful; ridiculing; making fun of someone
Mourning	grieving; lamenting; woeful
Naïve	innocent; unsophisticated; immature
Narcissistic	self-admiring; selfish; boastful; self-pitying

Nasty	unpleasant; unkind; disagreeable; abusive
Negative	unhappy, pessimistic
Nostalgic	thinking about the past; wishing for something from the past
Objective	without prejudice; without discrimination; fair; based on fact
Obsequious	overly obedient and/or submissive; fawning; grovelling
Optimistic	hopeful; cheerful
Outraged	angered and resentful; furious; extremely angered
Outspoken	frank; candid; spoken without reserve
Pathetic	expressing pity, sympathy, tenderness
Patronising	condescending; scornful; pompous
Pensive	reflective; introspective; philosophical;

	contemplative
Persuasive	convincing; eloquent; influential; plausible
Pessimistic	seeing the negative side of things
Philosophical	theoretical; analytical; rational; logical
Playful	full of fun and good spirits; humorous; jesting
Pragmatic	realistic; sensible
Pretentious	affected; artificial; grandiose; rhetorical; flashy
Regretful	apologetic; remorseful
Resentful	aggrieved; offended; displeased; bitter
Resigned	accepting; unhappy
Restrained	controlled; quiet; unemotional
Reverent	showing deep respect and esteem
Righteous	morally right and just; guiltless; pious; god-fearing
Satirical	making fun to show a weakness;

	ridiculing; derisive
Sarcastic	scornful; mocking; ridiculing
Scathing	critical; stinging; unsparing; harsh
Scornful	expressing contempt or derision; scathing; dismissive
Sensationalistic	provocative; inaccurate; distasteful
Sentimental	thinking about feelings, especially when remembering the past
Sincere	honest; truthful; earnest
Sceptical	disbelieving; unconvinced; doubting
Solemn	not funny; in earnest; serious
Subjective	prejudiced; biased
Submissive	compliant; passive; accommodating; obedient
Sulking	bad-tempered; grumpy; resentful; sullen

Sympathetic	compassionate; understanding of how someone feels
Thoughtful	reflective; serious; absorbed
Tolerant	open-minded; charitable; patient; sympathetic; lenient
Tragic	disastrous; calamitous
Unassuming	modest; self-effacing; restrained
Uneasy	worried; uncomfortable; edgy; nervous
Urgent	insistent; saying something must be done soon
Vindictive	vengeful; spiteful; bitter; unforgiving
Virtuous	lawful; righteous; moral; upstanding
Whimsical	quaint; playful; mischievous; offbeat
Witty	clever; quick-witted; entertaining
Wonder	awe-struck; admiring; fascinating

World-Weary	bored; cynical; tired
Worried	anxious; stressed; fearful
Wretched	miserable; despairing; sorrowful; distressed

Helpful Tip: Finding the correct tone is a matter of practice. Try and write for different audiences. Even if you only want to write novels, it is an apprenticeship of sorts. Write press releases. Write opinion pieces. Write interviews. Write copy. Write a business plan. The more you write, the better you will become at pitching your work with the nuances needed to create the perfect book.



by [Amanda Patterson](#). Follow her on [Pinterest](#), [Facebook](#), [Google+](#), [Tumblr](#) and [Twitter](#).

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Wow you got a good thing going very evolved module for writers thank you

— Sanjeev talpade

Thanks for all the wonderful tones this really made my class understanding way easier when we write in class. Thanks for your help.

— Matti

Thank you, Matti. We're glad this helped.

— Writers Write

Thank you for this list! Although I think you misspelled skeptical as sceptical.

— Hanna

No, we spelt it correctly. We use British English in South Africa.

— Writers Write

Your explanation is really helpful. Now I can clearly explain the topic to my students. Thanks a lot

— Ucup Hermawan

Even though philosophers have constantly argued that perfection cannot be reached. This is perfect.

— Heather Mangate

Very helpful , thank you.

— emely

May I distribute this list to my 10th grade English students, as long as I give you credit for it?

— Laurel Christopherson

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